

## Interview: Legendary Star Tony Curtis Likes it Hot in His Life, Career

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The name of the new autobiography from Tony Curtis is perfectly descriptive ... “American Prince.” From his hard-scrabble early life on the streets of the Bronx to the glamor and glitz of Hollywood stardom, Curtis has had a journey that experienced both the heights and depths of celebrity.

Working with the A-list of movie making icons, Curtis has several classic films to his name including “Some Like it Hot”, “The Defiant Ones”, ‘Spartacus’ and “Sweet Smell of Success”.



Tony Curtis, American Prince

*Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com*

HollywoodChicago.com caught up with the 83 year-old Tony Curtis recently at the Hollywood Collector Show. In an interview, he talked about his personal philosophy, choice of roles and his life-long passion with painting.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** In your book, 'American Prince,' what impression do you think a reader will come away with about Tony Curtis that they would never expect?

**Tony Curtis:** Perhaps my energy, perhaps my drive. It's very hard to project that at any age, particularly when you are young. I wasn't happy living in the Bronx. And it wasn't because it was the Bronx, it could have been any town. There was something about not being able to express myself and I wanted to be able to do that.

Perhaps at an early age I chose acting as a way to be able to do it, and I'm glad I did. It's seemed as if I had an affinity for it. I was lucky.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Looking back on your very first days in Hollywood, and knowing what you know now, what advice would you give your younger self?

**Curtis:** Don't get into movies! (laughter)

Pay attention to everyone around you. Learn little subtleties about what the human condition is like. You'll meet people who don't ever express who they are or what they want to be. We're all made up of secrets.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** It seems looking back to the period where you made 'The Defiant Ones' and 'Sweet Smell of Success,' that

these were movies that defied the morality and convention of the day. Did you and the filmmakers realized after you were done with these movies, especially Sweet Smell of Success, that number one, they were going to piss off a few people and two, that they would become classics?

**Curtis:** I had no idea what classics meant. I was living amongst them and I didn't know that maybe one of my movies might be. I'm not being modest now, I'm just saying emotion and morality roll around in the atmosphere and maybe these films catch up to them. Some of them are popular now and maybe they'll survive, maybe they won't. The point primarily is to find something that defies what you imagined a normal convention to be.



Tony Curtis in 'Sweet Smell of Success'  
Photo credit: Criterion Collection

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You worked with two renown comedy directors around the same time in 1959, Billy Wilder and Blake Edwards. What were the notable differences between the two men in their approach to comedy?

**Curtis:** Both directors were very different. Blake and I were approximately the same age, he's a couple years older than I. Billy Wilder was 20 years older than I. Billy Wilder was a European, German, Jewish fellow. Tough as nails. You knew when you stepped into his company, be careful. You are liable to step on a barb. He would find jokes about you, that you didn't want to hear, about your hair or about the way you stood. The attitude of who you were.

Blake on the other hand, had a comic sensibility at all times. He had seen all the early silent film comedies. He brought their sensibility to his films and gave them another level of consciousness. The similarity between the two men is that they both had a tremendous sense of comedy, but they were very different when developing it.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** One of your great underrated films in your later career was 1985's 'Insignificance'. What experience did you draw upon to play the character of the "The Senator", who was modeled after Senator Joseph McCarthy?

**Curtis:** In putting that part together, I had no difficulty in understanding The Senator and what was going on with his character. What was difficult was finding the way to provoke my fellow actors. Was it the way I should stand, was it what I was saying? What did they know about my character that I didn't know that they had heard somewhere? How would I use these traits to provoke them?

I had to become a good detective, because in searching that out I was able to find out what The Senator was like. And he was one mean motherf\*cker.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** As a painter of high reputation, how important is it to your life?

**Curtis:** Painting is as important to me as speaking, the images captured here with a camera or as playing a part in a movie. It's part of my energy.

I am really fortunate that all of those experiences has become part and parcel of my life. When I opened myself up to them, I found I had a gift for them.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What painter in history would you have liked to portray on stage or screen and why?

**Curtis:** Matisse. In his later years, the man was crippled and not well. And I think for someone who is deprived of the ability to accomplish something and still proceeds to accomplish it, is a gift that brings tears to my eyes.

"American Prince: A Memoir" by Tony Curtis with Peter Golenbock is available now. [Click here for the HollywoodChicago.com slideshow of the Hollywood Collector Show](#) [15]



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